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ABSTRACT

Four years after a study of paternal involvement among intact, middle-class families with an infant, a follow-up was conducted of 26 of the still intact families to determine the stability of paternal involvement and the psychological predictors of fathers' behavior at the time. Paternal involvement was assessed at both times in terms of care, play, and overall involvement. For purposes of comparison, scores at each time were converted to standard scores. In the first study, parents completed Spence and Helmreich's (1978) PAQ and AWS. Data were analyzed through regressions and repeated measures ANOVAs. Fathers' involvement at the time of the first study was fairly conventional. The average father provided 32 percent of his infant's parenting. On the basis of Radin and Goldsmith's (1985) report, it was anticipated that fathers' involvement would be stable over the period examined, and that fathers would be less involved with daughters than with sons at the time of the second study. The first hypothesis was supported, but no sex of child differences in fathering were found. In the first study, the father's attitude toward women (AWS), but not his personality (PAQ), predicted his caring for the baby. That relationship persisted over time. Fathers' attitudes at the time of the first study were the best predictors of their involvement when the child was five. Implications of the findings and their generality are discussed. (Author/RH)

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INFANCY TO AGE FIVE: PREDICTING FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

This project concerns the temporal dynamics of male parental behavior. Four years after a study of paternal involvement among intact, middle-class families with an infant, a follow-up was conducted of 26 of the located and still intact families to determine the stability of paternal involvement as well as the psychological predictors of fathers' current behavior. Paternal involvement was assessed at both times in terms of care, play, and overall. For purposes of comparisons, scores at each time were converted to standard scores. At time-1 parents also completed Spence & Helmreich's (1978) PAQ and AWS. Data were analysed using regressions and repeated measures ANOVAs.

Fathers' time-1 involvement was fairly conventional. The average father provided 32% of his infant's parenting-- 27% care, 54% play. Radin & Goldsmith (1985) studied fathers of slightly older children for a similar (4 year) period. On the basis of their report, it was anticipated that fathers' involvement would be stable over the period examined here. It was also expected that fathers would be less involved with daughters at time-2 than with sons. The first hypothesis is supported (r=.7265, p=.000). However, the data do not reveal any sex of child differences in fathering by these men. At time-1 the father's attitude toward women (AWS), but not not personality (PAQ), predicted his caring for the baby (Bailey, 1986). That relationship persists over time. Attitude at time-1 is the best predictor of fathers' involvement (r=.4227, p=.000) when the child is five. The implication of these findings and their generality are discussed.

BACKGROUND

The research reported here was concerned with the temporal dynamics of male parental behavior. That is, the stability of fathers' involvement with the passage of time. Most of the research reported on this topic has considered fathers' involvement during the child's infancy only. An exception is Radin and Goldsmith (1985) who investigated fathers' involvement when their children were preschoolers (3-5) and again 4 years later. There are apparently no (published) studies which have examined fathers' involvement with their children as infants and again several years later.

A review of the fathering literature suggests that the temporal dynamics of paternal involvement are such that a nontraditional (high) level of participation in day to day care is a relatively brief phenomena. Most nontraditional families revert to traditional patterns of parenting within 4 years and usually less. In the Radin and Goldsmith study families were originally categorized on the basis of parents' estimates of the percent of the time the father was the primary caregiver. For the "father primary" group the mean was 57%, with 41% for the "intermediate" and 22% for the fathers in "mother primary" families. Four years later men in the "father primary" group were found to have significantly decreased their involvement, while fathers in the other two groups had not. A significant effect was found for sex of focal child; across groups there was a greater decrease in involvement by fathers of daughters.

HYPOTHESES

Two hypothteses were advanced on the basis of Radin and Goldsmith's findings. In the research reported here, the fathers' involvement at time-1 (infancy) was typical of their "intermediate" and "mother primary" groups (care=27%, play=54%, overall involvement=32%). Therefore, it was expected that fathers' involvement would be stable over the period examined here. It was also anticipated that fathers would be less involved with their daughters at time-2.

In a previous report on the fathers studied here (Bailey, 1986), the father's caring for his infant was predicted by his attitude toward women (AWS) not his personality (PAQ). It was anticipated that this relationship would persist over time.

METHOD

The Sample. Twenty-six families participated in this study (Table 1a). They were White, intact, and middle- to upper-middle class. Sixty-two percent of the children were boys. At time-1 (1980-81) the focal-child in each family was just beginning its second year (M=13 mon) while at time-2 (1986) he/she averaged 64 mon. When they were infants, fifty-four percent of the children had no siblings; four years later only 27% were only-children. Parents were well educated and in their middle 30's at time-2. The initial sample included 39 families. By the time of the follow-up 13 families were either unlocated or divorced/ separated. In the analyses there is some further reduction in n due to incomplete data for some families at time-1; all time-2 data sets are complete (see footnotes at Table 1).

The Measures. Father's involvement at time-1 (1980-81) was measured using a 24-hour, 7-day Baby's Day Diary. Paternal behavior was assessed as the percent of father's involvement (father/father + mother) in care, play, and overall. At time-1 parents also completed Spence and Helmreich's (1978) PAQ and AWS. Father's parenting at time-2 was measured using a questionnaire which assesses parents' relative involvement in 11 care and 8 play/social interaction behaviors. Scores for responses range from "mother always"=0 to "father always"=4, with "father & mother equally" as 2. Although both parents individually completed the questionnaire, only fathers' responses are used in the analyses reported here. For cross-time comparisons, scores at each time were transformed to standard scores (x-M/sd).

RESULTS

Cross-time correlations of fathers' involvement on care (r=.6962, p=.000) and overall (r=.7265, p=.000) indicate a high degree of stability in paternal involvement (Table 1b). No significant relationship was found for play. The data do not reveal any sex-of-child differences in parenting by these men. Repeated measures analyses of variance do not produce any significant sex x time interactions nor main effects for sex.

Father's personality and attitude at time-1 were correlated with his participation on each involvement measure at time-2 (Table 1c). His attitudes toward women was the best predictor of his involvement overall (r=.4227, p=.045) and in care (r=.3948, p=.062) when the child was five. Father's instrumentality and expresiveness when the child was an infant did not predict his behavior with it four years later. Play was predicted by neither attitude nor personality.

To assess the relative contributions of father's time-1 psychological characteristics to his involvement at time-2, stepwise multiple regressions were run with the time-1 PAQ and AWS scores as predictors and father's time-2 involvement in care, play, and overall as the (separate) criterion variables. The male parent's playing with his five-year-old was not predicted by these characteristics. Similarly, the multiple-analysis revealed no pattern of predictors of time-2 care. As might be expected, given the bivariate analyses, father's overall involvement was predicted by his attitude-- and attitude alone (R=.4227, R^2=.1786).

TABLE 1

(a)

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS, n=26

FOCAL-CHILD:		
SEX(MALE)	61.5%	
	TIME-1	TIME-2
AGE	13 MON	64 MON
ONLY-CHILD	54%	27%
SOCIAL CLASS[1]		
I (HIGHEST)	61.5%	
II	38.5%	
	MEAN	SD
AGE:		
FATHER	36.89	4.66
MOTHER	34.92	3.32
EDUCATION (5=SOME COLLEGE):		
FATHER	5.96	0.96
MOTHER	5.50	0.95

(b)

FATHERS' INVOLVEMENT AT T1 AND T2, MEAN(SD)

	TIME-1 PERCENT	TIME-2 SCALE	r	p
INVOLVEMENT[2]				
CARE	26.56 (14.17)	1.3261 (0.4576)	.6962	.000
PLAY	53.60 (15.52)	2.1023 (0.2436)	.0685	.762
OVERALL	31.66 (11.21)	1.6615 (0.3071)	.7265	.000

(c)

FATHERS' TIME-1 CHARACTERISTICS CORRELATED WITH INVOLVEMENT AT TIME-2

T1 CHARACTERISTICS[3]	MEAN(SD)	r WITH T2 INVOLVEMENT CARE	PLAY	OVERALL
INSTRUMENTALITY	22.4348 (4.2300)	.1921	.0210	.1569
EXPRESSIVENESS	20.8261 (3.6138)	.2628	-.1461	.1598
ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN	28.5217 (8.0728)	.3948 (p=.062)	.2522	.4227 (p=.045)

[1] social class, parents' age and education given for time-2
[2] n=22 involvement measures available at both times
[3] n=23 PAQ & AWS available at time-1

DISCUSSION

The hypothesis that father's involvement would remain stable over the four year period was supported. This was true of father's overall involvement as well as his participation in day-to-day care. It is axiomatic that "the best predictor of behavior is past behavior"; that truism is not disconfirmed by the findings presented here. More than half (52.78%) of the variance in father's overall involvement at time-2 is predicted by his involvement four years previously.

The involvement scores at both times indicate that, on average, these children are cared for by "mother usually" but play with "father and mother equally". They receive a regular, if modest, degree of parenting from their father-- but the degree is consistent. This male parenting is more likely to consist of social interaction than routine maintanance. The anticipated attenuation of fathers' involvement with their daughters was not found. Fathers were equally involved with children regardless of sex-- and this was not diminished by time.

By conventional definition, these fathers are border-line "liberal" in their attitude toward the roles of men and women in the family and society. This attitude is significantly related to involvement with the child within and across time. Previous analyses involving these parents had shown that father's caring for the infant was explained by his attitude toward women but not-- as is often suggested, by his gender-related personality. The previously described relationship persists during the child's early childhood.

The stability in fathers' involvement and the irrelevance of child's gender are certainly noteworthy. The evidence concerning fathers attitude is, however, perhaps the most important finding. The popular and professional literature not infrequently suggest that fathers' childrearing will be causally enhanced by the "feminizing" of male personality. Such suggestions are not supported by the evidence presented here. Father's attitude--not personality, predicted his involvement. Men's involvement with their children may be more efficiently enhanced through changes in attitude. In terms of practical considerations, there is a wealth of findings from empirical and clinical studies indicating that attitude is much more labile, amendable to change than is basic personality (e.g., Adame, 1986; see also Fishbein & Azjen, 1975; Diggins & Huber, 1976; Freud, 1940/1969).

Fathers in this study were well-educated, White males in their middle 30's. They come from intact, middle- to upper-middle class families. It may well be that the evidence presented here does not generalize beyond similar men and families. Yet such families do comprise a sizable absolute number of families in our society, in addition they often form the "cutting edge" for social norms, and further such parents are those most likely to seek out and examine this sort of evidence (e.g., Bogart & Gensheimer, 1986). These findings should not be dismissed lightly.

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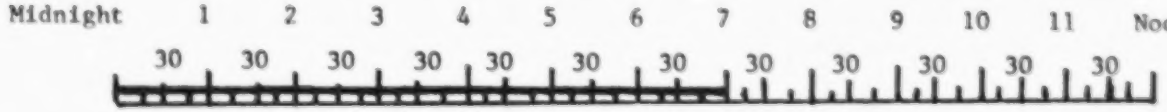
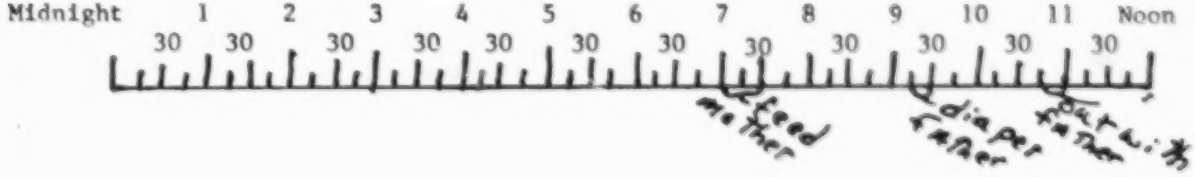
Baby's Day Diary

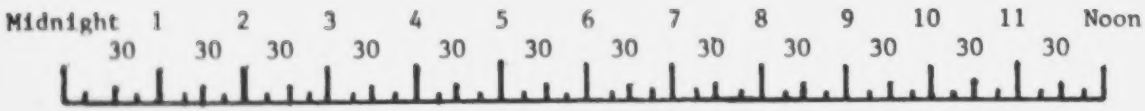
Please use this diary to indicate baby's activities during the day which involve one of its parents (or other caregivers). The time bars represent the day from midnight - noon and noon - midnight of one day. The time bars are divided into 15 minute segments (small marks), and each half-hour and hour is indicated. There is a separate page for each of seven days. In addition to recording the information which is requested, please feel free to make comments about yourself or your child which you think are noteworthy. After completing the 7th day of the diary, please return it by mail. in the envelope provided. Thank you.

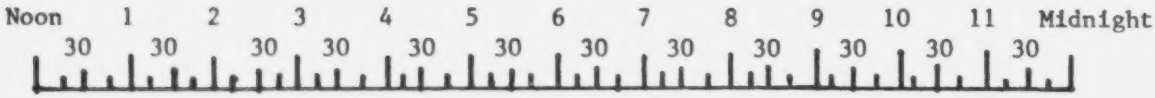
Instructions: indicate times when the baby is asleep by drawing a dark line. Example



During the times when the baby is awake, indicate if it was involved in any of the following activities and which parent (or other caregiver) was also involved. Activities are: feeding, diaper changing, bathing, going to bed, play, going out with one parent, parent gets up with child during the night. Examples:







Comments:

Note: diaries contained 7 copies of this page, one for each day of a week.

Who usually does the following child-related activities? Please reply with regard to your child _____ ONLY. We are interested here in him/her only.

	Father always	Father usually	Father & Mother equally	Mother usually	Mother always	Does not apply
Dress child						
Discipline child						
Put child to bed						
Take child to daycare/school						
Pick child up from daycare/school						
Stay home when child is ill						
Take child to doctor or dentist						
Bathe child						
Buy child's clothes						
Wake child up in morning						
Arrange babysitting						
Take child on outings (zoo, park, movie, etc)						
Go for a walk with child						
Read to child						
Watch TV with child						
Spend "quiet time" with child						
Play with child using toys						
Play games with child (non-toy play)						
Physical/rough & tumble play						